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a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and

wherein an inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from at least the chamber in which said substrate is present among said three chambers at least during a period in which said substrate is present during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

2. (Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of: exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:

a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber; and

wherein an inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from all of said three chambers during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

3. (Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of: exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

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wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:
a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;
a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and
a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and
wherein an inert gas is supplied to at least the chamber coupled to a vacuum pump among said three chambers and exhausted from this chamber using said vacuum pump during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

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6. (Amended) A substrate processing method, comprising the steps of:
exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,
wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the, following three steps:
a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;
a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and
a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and
wherein an inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from at least the chamber in which said substrate is present among said three chambers at least during a period in which said substrate is present during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

Please add the following claims 9-19:

9. (New) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:
exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,
wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:
a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;
a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and
a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and
wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and in this vacuum pump, a gas flow from an upstream side to a downstream side of this vacuum pump is formed during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.
10. (New) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:
exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,
wherein an inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber during said substrate transferring step.
11. (New) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:
exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and

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transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber, the method further comprising the step of:
supplying and exhausting an inert gas to and from the preliminary chamber during a period in which the substrate is present within said preliminary chamber after the substrate is transferred into said preliminary chamber.

12. (New) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 1, wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and this vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from at least said chamber in which the substrate is present.

13. (New) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 2, wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and this vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from at least said chamber in which the substrate is present.

14. (New) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 3, wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to all of said three chambers.

15. (New) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 6, wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and this vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from at least said chamber in which the substrate is present.

16. (New) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 10, wherein a vacuum pump is coupled to at least said preliminary chamber among said three chambers, and this vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber.

17. (New) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 11, wherein a vacuum pump is coupled to at least said preliminary chamber among said three

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chambers, and this vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber.

18. (New) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 10, wherein a cassette holding the plural substrates is used for the exchange of the substrate between said preliminary chamber and the external part, and the cassette holding the plural substrates is transferred into said preliminary chamber.

19. (New) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 11, wherein a cassette holding the plural substrates is used for the exchange of the substrate between said preliminary chamber and the external part, and the cassette holding the plural substrates is transferred into said preliminary chamber.

REMARKS

Claims 1-19 are pending in this application. By this Amendment, claims 1-3 and 6 are amended and new claims 9-19 are added. New claims 9-19 correspond to elected Group I. No new matter has been added. Reconsideration in view of the forgoing amendments and following remarks is respectfully requested.

The attached Appendix includes marked-up copies of each rewritten claim (37 C.F.R. §1.121(c)(1)(ii)).

I. Restriction

The Office Action makes final the July 26, 2002 Restriction Requirement, restricting the invention to the subject matter of claims 1-6 and withdrawing claims 7 and 8 from further consideration. Applicant respectfully submits that new claims 9-19 also correspond to the subject matter of elected Group I, consisting of claims 1-6.

II. Pending Claims 1-19 Define Patentable Subject Matter

The Office Action rejects claims 1-4 and 6 under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as anticipated by U.S. Patent 6,328,864 to Ishizawa et al. (hereinafter Ishizawa); and rejects claim 5 under 35